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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

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ALONG with the archæological study of the Bible there has of late been developing an interest in the psychological aspects of Scripture. It was natural that such should be the case, for in all branches of literary investigation the same is true. When novelists, poets, dramatists, philosophers, sociologists, as well as physiologists, are approaching human life from the point of view of a new psychology, it was impossible that biblical study, always so sensitive to contemporary influences, should have been unaffected. And so it has come about that, not only in the realm of metaphysical theology, but in exegesis and scriptural biography, there has grown up an altogether new study of the self-consciousness of the characters of the Bible.

THE PSYCHO-
LOGICAL VIEW IN
BIBLICAL STUDY

And this interest is certainly new, for while the older investigation of the psychological *teaching* of the biblical writers continues, this is not systematic but personal. For the time is past when the psychological presuppositions of the Bible are of importance, except as they enable biblical theology better to answer its own questions. Few men nowadays go to Moses or Paul, or even Jesus, to get a final explanation of the elements of personality—to be certain as to whether man is composed of body, soul, and spirit, or of body and soul. It is possible, perhaps, to formulate a systematic biblical psychology, but the effort is recognized as belonging to the realm of archæology. As a contribution to

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modern science it is only of historical value, and as a contribution to a scientific theology and soteriology it is entitled to hardly more regard.

The new point of view is interpretative, and especially concerns the problem of those who in the Bible are represented as living in special union with God.

First of all it concerns the prophets as those who spoke for God. What was the nature of the prophetic gift as the prophets themselves understood it? Did they or did they not retain their conscious identity as they published the word of God? Were they or were they not aware of the real content of their message? Did they speak as mere mouthpieces of God, or did they, from the study of the circumstances of their time and from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, consciously teach as men teach today, only with greater truth? Were they aware of a twofold applicability of their words, one to those to whom they spoke, and another to the Christ to come after centuries?

To answer these questions satisfactorily one must certainly examine with microscopic attention every expression that leads to the prophet's own conception of his office and to his judgment upon his own experience of God. Whether or not such judgment was correct, it is something that cannot be disregarded, for in it may lie the key to the understanding of the prophet's message.

Even more important is a study of the mind of Paul. Christian faith, both directly and indirectly, is so dependent upon his experience on the way to Damascus and the interpretation he has placed upon it that apologetics itself cannot afford to omit a careful study of the self-consciousness of the apostle as it is revealed in his writings. To say nothing about his entire conception of the Christian life as a possession of the life of God through Christ, and of his knowledge of the change through which his moral life passed, the problem of the appearance of Jesus to him is

THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PROPHETS

THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF PAUL

distinctly one that falls within the sphere of psychology. As to whether that appearance was wholly subjective, a product of overstrained nerves or religious excitement, or was produced by an objective, sensuously perceived reality, the answer can come from Paul alone. And here a knowledge of the general and particular traits of his mind is indispensable. Fortunately such knowledge is not difficult to gain. No man was ever more expert in introspection, and his writings abound in data expressing his own knowledge of himself. To interpret them, to combine them, to catch their necessary implications, and then to read through them the depths of Paul's consciousness, this is a problem which is neither subtle nor uninviting. Yet, beyond a few attempts made too much under dogmatic—or anti-dogmatic!—influences, it has never received the attention it deserves.

Far more complex and subtle, but correspondingly far more important, is the study of the self-consciousness of Jesus. And this is already receiving much of its proper attention. Till within a few years most writers upon his life and character have been content with its externals. Criticism and archæology have done valiant service in putting to flight moralizing and metaphysics, but they themselves have been content to deal with matters which help us to understand his work and his words rather than with the central problem of himself. It is, in fact, difficult to keep the true perspective when one comes to the wealth of material now ready at hand for the student of the Lord's life. Jewish customs, historical geography, descriptions of towns and water courses, rabbinical parallels, throw a strong spell over one's mind, often distract one's thoughts from the personality in whose service they have been evoked. But, after all, they are confessedly of secondary importance, and the most recent attempts at portraying Jesus are careful to make him, and not erudition, supreme.

But to know him is first of all to know him as he stood revealed to himself. Not what theologians and critics, or even

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apostles, have thought of him, but what he himself thought of himself—this is the core of Christianity. But it is not a mere problem in speculative philosophy. The early centuries of Christianity have made only too evident the possibilities of misunderstanding Jesus that lie in attempts to explain his nature. The study of the consciousness of Jesus, as it appears in his self-appellations, his teachings, his sinless life, his words concerning God, and his own relations with the Father, is for some other purpose than to determine the relative importance of divine and human ingredients in his personality. It is rather that one may know him better, and, knowing him, may see the God whom his own nature, in turning in upon itself, discovered and revealed. It was the sense of sonship that made Jesus the Son, and to discover that sense as he described it will be one step toward making the disciple like his Master.

From this new point of view in biblical study no sincere student need be turned. For the effort to discover a man's estimate and understanding of himself requires little or no technical training. Indeed, it is less dependent upon learning than upon that skill drawn from ordinary experience in life which enables one to know men rather than to know about them. It is true the proper classification and explanation of such observation, as well as the gathering of facts that depend finally upon technical study, must be left to professional scholars. But the essentials themselves lie at hand for anyone who will undertake to look for them. And, finding thus the expressions of their inmost conscious life, he will come to know, love, and emulate, as never before was possible, prophets and apostles and the Christ.

*SUCH STUDY
POSSIBLE
FOR ALL*